



Testimony in support of **Senate Bill 284**: Increasing the age from eight to eighteen years for an income-eligible person to obtain medical assistance regardless of immigration status.


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Public Testimony

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of Senate Bill 284. I am Sarianna Sabbarese, representing the Social Welfare Action Alliance: a group of radical/progressive social workers, activists, and allies working to address the structural roots of current social and economic inequities. In our work, SWAA seeks to call special attention to the fact that entrenched systemic injustice impoverishes EVERYBODY living in our society – not only those who are forced to shoulder a disproportionate share of the burden. Whether or not we ourselves can feel the ill effects of every unjust policy, or trip with our own feet over each gap in services, or tumble with our own body over the precipice of every single benefit cliff, each one of us is made poorer by the ways our society is ordered to enrich or protect the interests of the few at the expense of the many.

In the case of SB 284, we have an opportunity to edge closer to the place where all Americans – regardless of Immigration status, of course – will be able to live our lives free of the fear that an unforeseen medical expense will wreak havoc on our personal or family finances. It is appalling that in the wealthiest country in the world, anybody should have to grapple with this concern.

For undocumented Americans, who are not afforded even the same opportunities as the rest of us – the chance to seek employment that provides basic coverage options, or the ability to apply for Husky – expensive medical realities are especially devastating. So-called “safety net”



services may be woefully inadequate, but there is still a great deal of difference between living with these inadequacies and living in a state of free fall.

In the United States, there is no real road to legal citizenship status for so many of our community members and leaders – leaving them and their families vulnerable not only to arbitrary gaps in opportunities and services, but also to the sweeping social stigmas such gaps create. In the spirit of the critical, historically-focused, “root cause” analysis that SWAA favors, I invite this committee to consider the myriad ways stigma and prejudice are created, reinforced, and perpetuated by policies that leave certain segments of our communities more vulnerable than others to risk factors we all face. Do only certain children deserve protection from sickness and harm? The gap in health care services for children between the ages of 8 and 18 years can be interpreted just that way: it coincides with and corroborates the gaps in empathy and understanding that keep ALL of us from advancing beyond our current position. Partial or inadequate coverage signifies that some members of our communities have less value than others; that the lives and health of some are less worth protecting. I am here today to insist that we begin to correct this glaring inequity, so that we might continue to move forward and toward the place where Americans’ medical needs – our lives – are not treated differentially at all.

Maslow, one of the architects of modern social work, gave us this foundational wisdom upon which to build a better world: *Unless our bodies are in working order, we stand little chance of being able to actualize our latent human potential.* Every single one of us deserves that chance. The chance to grow up healthy. The chance to see our children grow up healthy. Regardless of how they are categorized by the state.

And ultimately, every single one of us deserves the chance to remain healthy into adulthood. I hope – as SWAA hopes – that the passage of SB 284 marks an important step on the road to enacting universal health care for all Americans, regardless of immigration status; which will, in turn, be an important step toward justice and equity for all. In both policy AND practice.

I urge you, with my whole heart, to pass this bill. Thank you again for this opportunity to share my feelings and thoughts with you today.